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Emerging Roles of Community Forest Associations in Kenya: The Cases of Arabuko–Sokoke Forest Adjacent Dwellers Association (ASFADA) and Meru Forest Environmental and Protection Community Association (MEFECAP)

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The introduction of Participatory Forestry Management (PFM) in Kenya from 1997 has led to the formation of community-based organizations which have come to be referred to as Community Forest Associations (CFAs). Most of the CFAs are preparing to enter into forest management agreements with the Kenya Forest Service (KFS). This will confer management roles to the community with the KFS retaining the forest resource ownership right and the right to withdraw the agreement in total or part. The CFAs are formed by individual members who join by paying a prescribed membership fee. The CFA structures are rather diverse although this is being harmonized. In forests where PFM is 10 years old, the CFAs are forming confederates, which are being referred to as Umbrella CFAs.

The Arabuko–Sokoke Forest Adjacent Dwellers Association (ASFADA) is a confederate of three CFAs and large user groups. Its role has been expanding from lobbying to conflict management, fund-raising, negotiating with the KFS during most of the meetings, initiating rural development and forestry development activities, and more importantly, developing systems that are introducing equity principles and addressing the needs of the poor and disadvantaged members of the community. The latter is posing a challenge to the elite, Government, and nongovernment officers who witness forest-adjacent communities' start projects like butterfly farming, bee keeping, farm forestry initiatives, and eco-tourism facilities.

The Meru Forest Environment and Forest Protection Community Association (MEFECAP) is an umbrella to over 50 user groups involved in diverse activities ranging from forest protection, monitoring, and management to water extraction and distribution. These initiatives are adding value to PFM in a situation where otherwise communities would hardly have obtained any benefit from the forest. While the confederates are accomplishing all of these activities they are facing a challenge as they are not recognized by the forest legislation. This is putting them in a weak position since in some forests this is being used to deny them the right to participate and even threatening them with being disbanded. This scenario is arising because the confederates are emerging as centers of power and the CFAs are falling back to them when they face difficulties as they negotiate management rights with the KFS. Donors are warming to the CFAs, with some donors running projects, a development the forest officers are viewing as threat to their status. The elite are also fighting the confederates as they are shifting the community focus from them. A strategy needs to be developed to make the forest officers and the elite view the confederates as partners in forestry management and rural development.

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Introduction

Participatory Forest Management (PFM) is being adopted widely in many developing countries as an alternative method of managing forestry resources (Wily 2002). PFM is increasingly being used as an approach through which to achieve the sustainability of threatened forests and conservation of biodiversity. This is done through a process of inclusion, equity, and democratization of governance of the forest resources (Amanor 2003). PFM is a multistakeholder approach where the private sector, institutions, and communities are involved in management of forests and sharing of benefits that accrue from such management processes.

While PFM can be considered in the wider perspectives of Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM), community forest management (CFM) is the most emphasized approach for implementing PFM in many developing countries. CFM is basically an approach towards achieving forest sustainability and biodiversity conservation with socio-economic objectives (Kallert et al. 2000). These socio-economic objectives include equity, conflict resolution, awareness, forest production, poverty reduction, and sustainable utilization. The positive results of implementing PFM process will be demonstrated through the changed attitude of local forest-adjacent communities and hence, a change in the level of forest conservation, but such results will be highly influenced by the mode of participation adopted by the PFM implementation process.

The need to increase forest cover and reduce forest destruction and degradation has been recognized in Kenya (DRSRS and KFWG 2006). The Government has recognized the critical role to be played by forest-adjacent communities in ensuring that tree cover in the country increases from the current 2% to the recommended 10% (MENR 2007). In order to appreciate the point from which the country has to move in order to achieve its targeted forest cover, Nurse and Edwards (1993) described the former forest management system that has been practiced in Kenya over the years as demotivating for local communities and one that has made them participate in the destruction of the country's forest and tree resources. The new Forests Act (2005) is therefore a positive move for the local communities and this has already begun to act as a catalyst in their involvement in the management of the remaining forest resources (Ongugo et al. 2007).

The new Forests Act (2005) encourages local communities to participate in the management of forest resources adjacent to them. Arising from this new policy and law, new institutions are emerging to implement the process of involving local communities in the management of forest resources. These institutions are being established with the aim of co-managing forest resources with central and local government institutions such as the Kenya Forest Service (KFS) and the County Councils (CCs). In order for the local communities to enter into such co-management arrangements, they are legally expected to form and register Community Forest Associations (CFAs) within different forests distributed across the country (MENR 2007). Such an association will have to be vetted based on the following criteria before it can be allowed to operate: its objectives, composition of its management committee, election procedures, and the purpose for which its funds may be used. Despite all these requirements, CFAs just like any other institution may be mismanaged and eventually collapse. In addition, communities that form forest associations may not be homogeneous. They may also have varying socio-economic objectives for forming the associations. Lack of homogeneity may also affect their forest management objectives and this in effect may have an impact on the sustainability of the forest resources to which they are adjacent (Thurow 1995).

There has been a major effort to educate communities that live adjacent to major forests in Kenya (Figure 1). The effort has been geared towards enhancing their understanding of the requirements of both the new forest policy and act and how both of these new Government

documents relate to their involvement in the management of forest resources. This has resulted in the formation of about 100 CFAs distributed across the country.

Figure 1: Some of the Major Forests in Kenya

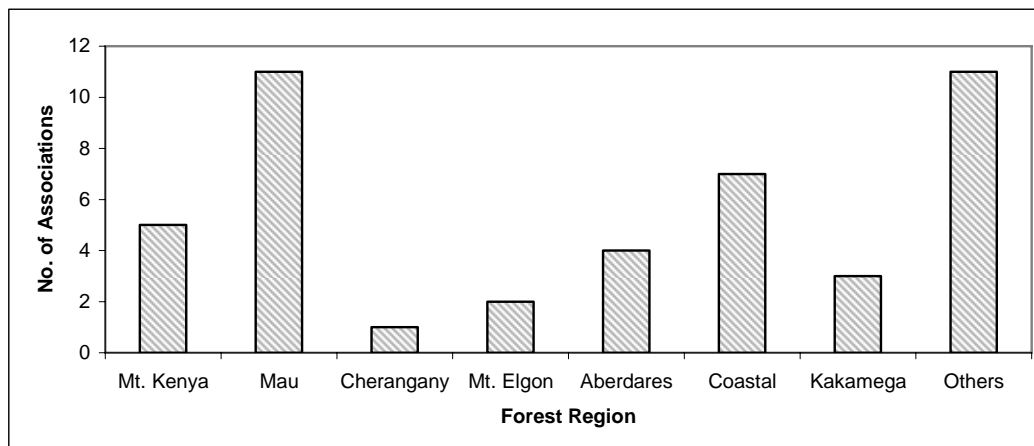


Formation of Community Forest Associations

According to the Forests Act (2005), section 46 (1), a member of a forest community may together with other members or persons resident in the same area register a community forest association under the Society's Act. According to section 46 (2), an association registered under section (1) may apply to the Director of Forest Service for permission to participate in the conservation and management of a state forest or a local authority forest in accordance with the provisions of the act (Ongugo et al. 2007).

All of the important forest regions in Kenya, often referred to as the country's water towers, have at least one registered CFA (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Distribution of CFAs According to Major Forest Ecosystems



Most of the forest associations (11) are located within the Mau forest ecosystem, which is the most important catchment for Lake Victoria. This is followed by the Arabuko–Sokoke Forest ecosystem which has seven forest associations with ASFADA being the most prominent. Mt. Kenya Forest has six forest associations with MEFECA being very well established. Other forest associations in the country are found in the Cherenganyi Forest (1), Mt. Elgon (2), Kakamega (4), and other small forest ecosystems that have a combined number of 10 forest associations. According to the last annual general meeting of the National Alliance of the Community Forest Associations (NACOF), which is the umbrella body of all the CFAs in Kenya, most of the associations had been formed as a result of campaigns by the Kenya (forest) Action Network (FAN) and the Kenya Forests Working Group (KFWG); both of which are national nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) involved in forestry governance in the country. Recently however, the Government through the newly created KFS has also been spearheading the establishment of CFAs as a way of fulfilling the requirement of the new Forests Act (2005), the implementation of which falls within the mandate of the KFS.

Challenges Facing CFAs

According to the results of a recent survey of CFAs in Kenya (Kinyanjui 2007), all the CFAs in Kenya had constitutions that were developed by consensus among all the members. Members' contributions through registration and monthly/annual subscription fees are the main sources of funds for the CFAs; an indication that the members are committed to supporting their associations. All the CFAs surveyed faced various types of challenges. Major challenges included lack of transparency among officials, failure of some members to contribute funds, sharing of benefits, and a dictatorial tendency among some of the leaders. These are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Challenges Facing CFAs

Challenges	Characteristics
Organization Complexity	Lack of defined structure and hierarchy at local, regional, and national levels, exclusion and inclusion definitions
	Diversity of origins, cultures, languages, and aspirations bringing mistrust and suspicion among members
	Complexity of implementation in plantation forests
	Fair responsibility and benefit-sharing challenges
Conflict of Interests	External interference
	Communal rights versus individual interests
	Ideal social situation versus prevailing conditions
	Conservation versus exploitation
	Existing capacity versus necessary capacity
	Policy-makers and professional perception versus community understanding of the group's objectives
	Prevailing attitude versus required attitude
	Plantation forests—community objectives versus industry' objectives
Group Historical Problems	Overreliance on external help (from NGOs)
	Inadequate funding
	Misappropriation of funds
	Politician and private business interference
	Mediocrity and difficulties in maintaining members' enthusiasm, commitment, and efforts for the long term
Emergent Problems	An overwhelming interest in groups by a large population
	Unpredictable evolution of groups over time
	Overdependence on forest resources by even larger numbers of people than before
Capacity	Inability to follow sustainable utilization patterns

Because of these challenges, a study to try and understand how these associations operated was initiated with MEFECAP and ASFADA being purposefully sampled as representatives of all the associations in the country.

Study Methods

The study involved the collection of records of the last annual meeting of the CFAs that had been formed and were operating in all the major forest ecosystems in Kenya (Figure 2). Additional information was obtained from the results of the Action Research in Poverty and Participation (ARPIP) program carried out in Arabuko–Sokoke Forest. The aforesaid data sources were then reinforced by an international study on forestry resources and institutions (IFRI) which has been ongoing in some of the forests for 10 years.

About MEFECAP

The CFA was established to form an umbrella body for the groups within the forest. The CFA's headquarters is at the Meru Forest Station and its area of jurisdiction is the Upper Imenti Forest Block in Mt. Kenya Forest. Membership in the CFA consists of members of the existing groups whose activities are related to forestry. Individuals cannot register to be members of the association. The groups include protection groups, fuelwood collectors, grazing groups, groups involved with the construction of the solar electric fence, among others (Ongugo et al. 2005).

The CFA has plans to set up a steering committee with representatives from the KFS, Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS), the Agriculture and Provincial Administration, and Meru Municipal, which will monitor its activities. The steering committee will spearhead implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the organization in an advisory capacity.

The affairs of the CFA are managed by a committee consisting of nine members, five of whom are office bearers (chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, vice-secretary, and treasurer) and who are also signatories to the CFA's bank account. The heads or agents of relevant institutions may be incorporated as ex-officio members during committee meetings.

The objectives for which the CFA was formed are:

- To protect the forest by assisting in patrolling and forwarding any information to the KFS that would assist the Forest Department in reducing destruction
- To conserve the forest through carrying out afforestation and plantation maintenance activities
- To protect water catchment areas through planting of appropriate tree species
- To uplift the standards of living of members of the participating groups by starting income-generating projects such as eco-tourism, bee keeping, grazing, and fuelwood collection
- To educate members on the importance of forest and environmental conservation

About ASFADA

ASFADA started as a pilot under the Dida Forest Adjacent Area Forest Association (DIFAAFA) to represent the dwellers adjacent to Dida block of Arabuko–Sokoke Forest. The association was formed by village forest development and conservation committees comprising three villages initially.

Because of the need for such an association to be relevant to the whole of Arabuko–Sokoke Forest, it later changed its name to the Arabuko Sokoke Forest Dwellers Association (ASFADA). This is the umbrella association responsible for all forestry-related activities in the area.

The major aim of the association is to police and protect the forest from encroachers and illegal harvesters. It also ensures that all the projects that are being implemented in the forest

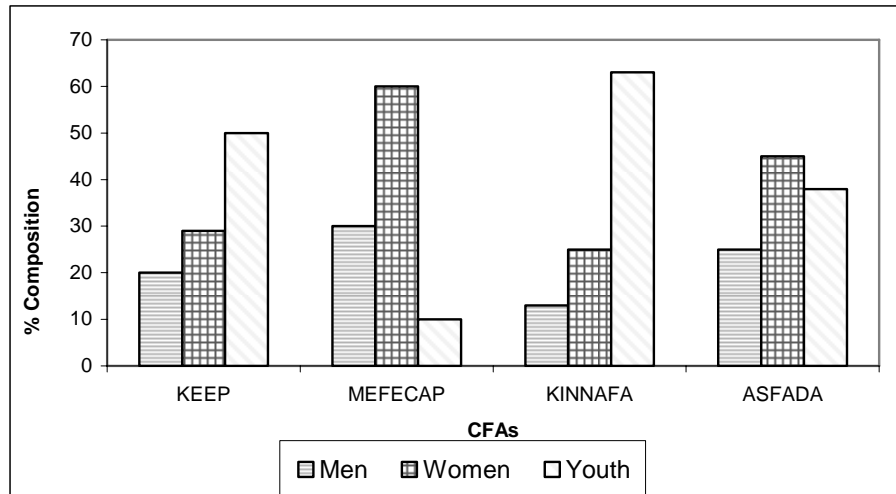
are run appropriately. In addition, the CFA encourages the households living adjacent to the forest to engage in gainful but nondestructive activities using the forest resource as a basic raw material. Members of the association are involved in honey production, butterfly farming, alternative medicine, and eco-tourism. Their involvement in butterfly farming through a project known as KIPEPEO has had worldwide acclaim for its success in involving local communities in gainful employment, while contributing to the conservation of the Arabuko–Sokoke Forest.

Results and Discussion

Participation by Gender among CFAs

Gender participation was considered a main factor in assessing the sustainability of CFAs. Kabutha and Humbly (1996) reported that women manage as much as 74% of Kenya's smallholding farms, implying that they hold the power to sustainable production of the country's land resources. In addition, the presence of young men and women in the membership of forest associations is vital to their success and sustainability. This is particularly important since most of the forest resources have long term benefits. Gender distribution in some of the CFAs including MEFECAP and ASFADA is shown in Figure 3. From the figure it can be seen that women and youth are well represented in many of the CFAs. Most of the youths in Kenya are not employed and their participation in the CFAs is a way of ensuring that they are kept busy carrying out activities that are not only beneficial to them but also to the forest resource and the environment in general.

Figure 3: Gender Distribution among Four Sampled CFAs



Activities that have attracted youth to the CFAs include participation in cultivation of food and cash crops in the forest, engaging in eco-tourism, and contracts to carry out silvicultural operations in the forests. Most of the CFAs have many members; for example, MEFECAP has a total of 1,500 members out of which 200 are young members and 800 are women.

Capacity-building Role

Most CFAs have people who have worked in the forestry and agriculture sectors as members. These members have knowledge of tree planting and management hence they guide other members of the CFAs in carrying out forestry-related activities. There is vast potential in the indigenous knowledge of members of CFAs since they have lived in the forests for a long time. Members of the CFAs often know the tree species in the forests, their uses, abundance, and diversity. Such knowledge is also important in education, research, and even in eco-tourism. This knowledge needs to be tapped as a way of enhancing the sustainability of the forest resources.

Benefit-sharing Role

Community involvement in forest management and environmental conservation has often been encouraged. This is based on the principle that forests provide intangible and not often direct or tangible benefits to those communities who participate in their management. This idea often does not encourage the involvement of local communities in the management of forests and other natural resources. From the study of both ASFADA and MEFECAP, it was found that tangible benefits that were available to the CFAs from the forests contributed to the cohesiveness of the CFA members (Ongugo et al. 2005). The benefits ensured the sustainability of the groups and therefore the principle of benefit sharing needs to be strengthened and stressed in all the CFAs in the country. Further, it was evident that most CFAs had been formed with the hope that the Government will in future allow them to reap real benefits such as nonresidential cultivation within the forests and harvesting of forest products (Table 2).

Table 2: Tangible Benefits for CFAs in Various Forests

Forest	Existing Income-generating Activities
Mau	Tree seedlings, <i>Prunus africana</i> bark herbal products, bee keeping
Kakamega	Tree seedlings, <i>Mondia whytei</i> and <i>Ocimum</i> spp. herbal products, bee keeping, butterfly farming, eco-tourism, artifacts
Coastal Forests	Aloe farming, tree seedlings, <i>Azadirachta indica</i> (neem) wood for carvings, butterfly farming, artifacts, farm forestry
Mt. Kenya	Tree seedlings, bee keeping, fuelwood, grass, water

When such benefits are exploited by the CFAs, there is the possibility of members gaining from employment opportunities that they provide. Such benefits would also include improved food security and enhanced survival of the trees growing in the forest.

Management Role

In plantation forests, the Forests Act provides for CFAs to enter into concession to manage forests adjacent to them. However, due to the lack of community silvicultural capacity to run these forests, many CFAs are forced to bring in collaborators, mainly from the private sector (Ongugo et al. 2004). These collaborators are better equipped in nursery techniques and plantation management. In instances where communities have established CFAs, the cultivation of food and cash crops in the forest is of paramount importance. But other forest products such as fuelwood, construction wood, and animal forage from the forest are essential. With them in mind, the leaders of the CFAs may have to train their members in silvicultural practices, forestry business, and improve knowledge on the intricate management of food/cash crops together with trees.

Conflict Resolution Role

There are several foreseeable conflict areas that might hinder the efficiency of CFAs. The Forests Act provides for corporate rights and responsibilities to the CFAs participating in forest management. However, communities that have heavily depended on the forest for a long time for livelihoods based on individual decision making on the utilization of forest resources will face conflicts when it comes to implementation of corporate decisions and agreement in the CFA situation.

Ideally, implementation of PFM requires a community with a reasonable level of economic development. This is because in their initial involvement in forest management the communities will have to give more than they can get from the forest resource. This is true for most of the utilizable means provided for in the Forests Act (e.g. honey harvesting, eco-tourism, timber production etc.). It will require them to have a long-term focus as long as benefits are concerned. On the other hand, the reality on the ground is different with the forest communities facing poverty, food insecurity, and lack of opportunities for livelihood in the larger economy. They therefore have a short-term focus on the benefits to accrue from their involvement in forest management.

Another conflict that is likely to arise in the course of implementing the PFM is on conservation versus exploitation of the forest. A major objective for involving communities in management of forest is to foster forest sustainability over time. From interviews with communities, it was clear that the motivation of most members of forest associations was the opportunity to utilize forest resources without the existing Government restrictions and only a few had perceived forest conservation as a priority. These perceptions may not augur well with conservation objectives bearing in mind that the limitations of the resource and convincing communities on striking a balance between conservation and exploitation will be hurdles that those working with these communities will have to face.

Further, the community's idea of how it should be involved in forest management seems to differ with the concept of PFM as prescribed in the Forests Act. For most of the people interviewed, participation in forest management meant participating in nonresidential cultivation as programmed and executed by the Forest Department and its representatives' involvement in the administration of the forest in the area. They also expected to decide on the way financial proceeds from the forest (especially from logging) were spent with a view that forest management would be decentralized and proceeds from forest would be reinvested in the development of the area. They showed lack of confidence in forming functioning and efficient associations capable of participating in forest management. This disparity in participation in forest management between the community and policy implementers is a major concern if the two groups (communities and policy implementers) are to move on the same footing.

Another potential source of conflict is the prevailing attitude of the community versus the attitude required if PFM implementation is to ensure forest sustainability. Communities still have the attitude that they are fully entitled to the forest land, a right they have been denied for so long and are bitter about. If the forest land could be used at their discretion, most community members would convert it to agriculture which is perceived to be a more profitable land use. It is a challenge for the CFAs to convince and to change these prevailing community attitudes towards the forests if they are to be effective.

Conclusion

The CFAs present a great opportunity to reduce the current pressure on forests by forest-adjacent communities for forest products and services. However, this opportunity will not be easy to tap unless deliberate effort is directed by those involved in the implementation of the PFM process to build on the community's strongpoints of concern for using the forest resource for livelihood improvement. For communities to be reasonable contributors to sustainable forest management, they have to attain a reasonable level of socio-economic development, which will lead to the use of primary or natural resources, such as forests, for basic needs such as food, shelter, and fuel. Further, they will have to be sensitized and educated on environmental issues in order to change their attitude towards the forest from being a primary source of products and services to that of a resource that is necessary for survival.

Communities need to be sensitized on other sources of livelihood to diversify their income bases and to participate in the wider economy of the country and allow efficient and sustainable utilization of forest resources. There is therefore a need to improve their education levels; also for tertiary training in various trades not necessarily related to forest resource exploitation, and for food security, health, water, energy, and other social services.

To achieve this, forest communities need to be mainstreamed among the vulnerable groups already identified such as women, youth, the disabled etc. This means the involvement of different Government ministries (health, education, water, development planning etc.) and development support in concrete efforts directed to forest community welfare.

Further, efficient implementation of the CFAs requires an elaborate framework and coordinated efforts rather than isolated efforts by different agencies and supporters nationwide. An implementation coordinating task force is thus needed to formulate this framework and coordinate the proposed efforts. The framework will enable good definition of the roles and responsibilities of the various groups (Government and nongovernment) involved in the implementation as well as serving as a forum for evaluation and experience sharing and coordinating the aforesaid proposed social development programs and projects.

The management of CFAs will definitely face intrinsic, complex issues and is likely to face difficulty in management. There is need to evaluate, critique, and study these emerging institutions and put in place ways to aid their effectiveness. It should be noted that in striving to involve communities in sustainable forest management, the ecological limitations of these forest resources are real and thus the success of the approaches applied is paramount.

It is recommended that:

1. The CFAs need to be supported by the Government and natural resource management agencies and donors who support PFM. They need to be trained in conflict resolution, leadership and management skills, and financial management.
2. Farm forestry and establishment of botanical gardens for medicinal plants should be encouraged so that communities directly and indirectly benefit from the forests.
3. NACOFA should be strengthened to harmonize the activities of the different CFAs and be a center of dissemination of information for the CFAs and the member communities.

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